

DELTA

No. 5

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delta

Edited by PHILIP HOBSBAUM

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One reviewer hailed our third issue as "a refreshing change from the present run of Cambridge poetry" which had previously been more like a shambles. If a poem once "caught on", its author's work was subsequently copiously published on the strength of his "name". Though two-thirds of the poets in that May issue had not previously been published in Cambridge, no retrospective apology is necessary for the inclusion of David Ward, Edward Lucie-Smith, Robert Arnold, or Richard Drain.

Partly because of the literary lions' departure, partly because of a few intelligent reviews which Karl Miller published in *Granta* (together with some appalling verse which rather counteracted them), Cambridge became more exacting. One was no longer gratified to find a poem which was not bad. Our Michaelmas issue printed work for the most part less "well-bred" but perhaps more adult than its predecessor. One reviewer disconcertingly complained at once that the poems did not "cling together," and that the editor should "publish more in greater variety"! Another wrote "*delta* contains nothing that does not merit careful attention."

The corresponding *Chequer*, together with some unobjectionable prose, published at least three poems which deserved a much wider circulation than they got. Ted Hughes's *Casualty*, Luke Myers's *Dolphin Catch*, and an "edited" version of Christopher Levenson's *Munchen Hauptbahnhof* had a vivid awareness of significant detail which confirmed a hope that *published* Cambridge writing was moving away from the vaguely mythical pseudo-Yeats of John Mander and Fred Grubb and the superficial slickness of Thom Gunn and Alasdair Aston into the definition of experience in more concrete terms.

Nevertheless, the kind of verse *written* (as far as an editor can tell from his submissions) does not radically change. A common property of the thousand or so poems I have rejected in the last nine months is lack of interest—in writing or in life. Some young poets perceive but fail in conveying a reaction. Others smoothly communicate—at too facile a level. Those who are worth reading twice combine perception and communication.

The first category is commoner. This may be experience—

*A swan-footed girl, her eyes
The grey of sun and water,
She punts the boat with a heavy pole,
Her shirt is splashed....*

—but it is insufficiently objectified into a pattern of emotional responses. Another poet reacts violently—

Newspaper writhes, soul of a slaughtered cat

—which presumably seems appropriate, to him.

The more sophisticated writer tends to fake or smooth out his emotional attitudes. He may elude definition in generalized statement—

The mind

*Can break and not be lost, but heal,
And, healing, learn new ways that things may feel
How future follows nimbly at thought's pace....*

—or in "literary" exaggeration:—

Each nerve ascream with jays

Often an elaborate diction excludes a poet from contact with contemporary reality and thus with his reader:—

*Spirit is body's death, and spirit's light
Is by desire eclipsed, the body's flame.
O paradigm and paradox! thus groan
Both flesh and soul in consecrated plight.*

Another conceals beneath his suave manner paucity:—

*What was it? But to concentrate was hard
Amidst the distracting noise that emphasized
His failure, as behind his back it grew
Into parched cries of "You! Turn round! You! You!"*

External imitation of Dylan Thomas is giving way to external imitation of Empson and his adherents—

The years remain, the years remain and weep

—and of the more Imagist kind of translation from the Chinese. Thom Gunn's contrived "fine onsets"—

You are not random picked. I tell you you....

—find (especially Oxford) imitators:—

He came as if from tunnels. The green field....

Those who skirt experience find congenial the myth—like *Pygmalion*:—

....a lover gained, a masterpiece

Irretrievably lost.

Others attempt to suggest vague significance through vague symbolism:—

(He) knew the pattern weaving through the deep

A symphony for voices.

Perhaps these negative criticisms may define my aims in editing *delta*. I looked for communication rather than gesticulation around experience, concreteness rather than abstract generalization or semi-seen personification, demonstration rather than statement. Poems are *basically*—not ideas, images, attitudes—but words. If the poem is inadequate as a verbal structure, it probably does not effectively exist as a poem. These words may individually have a range of meaning. In a poem they should condition each other to bring out those particular evocations relevant to the communication of a particular reaction. This reaction should be precise enough to be discussible, otherwise each reader will recreate around the verse his own private poem.

The poet adopts a pattern of words which sets up in the reader an emotive pattern. The nightmare abnormalities of

A woman drew her long black hair out tight

And fiddled whisper music on those strings....

contrasts with this undergraduate's confused over-explicitness—

Their terror, scribbled hastily as paper-clips....

The young poet writes best when closest to his own experience:—

In small hotels and lounges

People stand lost in windows, doing nothing....

....One last stilted tremor,

Oil feathered among the driftwood.

....There are sparrows

All outside the house, chittering

In the leafless trees and bushes.

Flitting in the stiff yellow air....

These should be contrasted with the "romantic" cliché of characteristically undergraduate work, such as

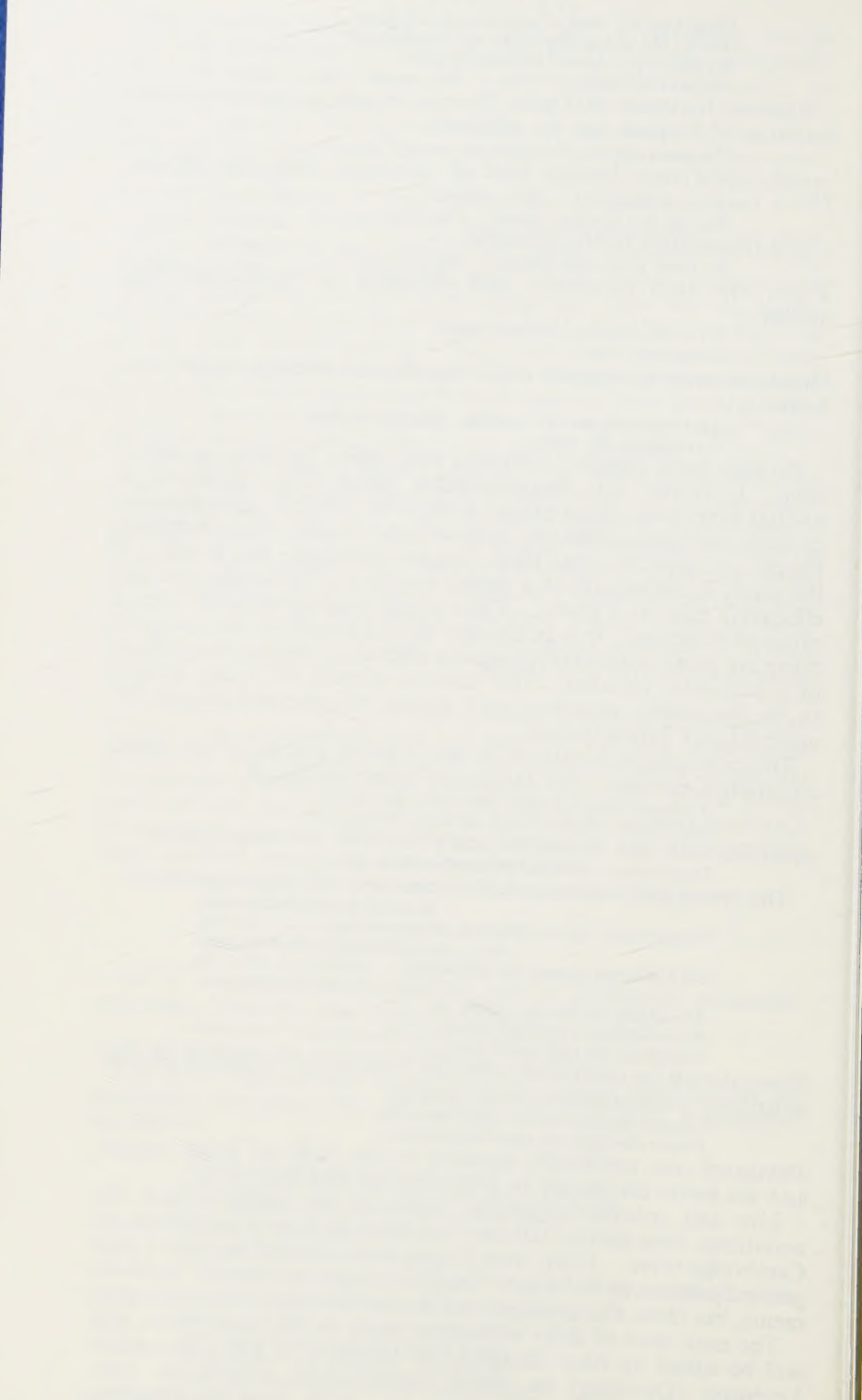
Caught like trawlers in demented seas

Under the dolorous rain-beaten moon.

Demented seas are hardly apposite to the fixity of being *caught*; and the moon can hardly be *beaten* by the rain beneath it.

Live and coherent simplicity seems to me healthier than the ambitious, even heroic, failures that form so large a proportion of Cambridge verse. From what I have seen, I should say that a poet generally develops not from "bad" attempts to "good" achievements, but from effects simple and limited into those more complex.

The next issue of *delta* will appear early in the Easter term, and will be edited by Alan Sheridan (St. Catharine's) and Christopher Levenson (Downing) to whom contributions should be sent. Advertising queries should be directed to N. W. MacGill (Trinity).



CAMBRIDGE, NOVEMBER

The afternoon evaporates in mist.
Faintly aware
Of dim lights on the landings,
A pause in the calendar,
Our senses drift, and only the sudden bell
Swung at an hours end, draws the skeins together
Into one net of consciousness, a groundswell
Mazing chapel and tower.

Muffled laughter in the streets below,
Or a shout nearby penetrating our dream
Can fashion passing time into some focus.
Between pillared shadows, shadows are sifted, walking
Over the Fellows' lawn. In dingy bars
As we seek ephemeral comfort, darkness breaks loose,
Flooding the town, and walking darkly home
We know ourselves merely as the day creates us,
Children of mist.

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON.

AUTOBAHN

Between twilight and dawn there is only the road,
Unwinding its endless darkness before the wheels.
Steadily the dials reiterate, the diesels drone
Formulas of power and speed as unwieldy loads in convoy
Blaze their trail of sound
Across viaducts, forests, over quiet valleys;
From all horizons headlamps cut, like diamonds,
Through space caught in parenthesis, time noticed in passing.

At concrete islands of light, tankstelles
Stranded like stars in the cold and empty distance.
Wagons are drawn up waiting as their crews swig warmth
And savour company to its last dregs of speech.
Conversation begins, is broken off, a random sleep
Slumps into blurred awareness, tired limbs still
Are drugged by desire to travel. Continually rear-lamps pass,
Dwindle and die like a snuffed cigarette.

Exiled ambassadors of their hearts' country, refugees
Carry the future in one attache case.
Here—a forced stop—they shiver and pace the neon.
New life seems spread out before them like a map,
But as coffee spills so do their courses wander,
And now in a halfway world between two evils
This is reality, the rumoured land
For which they fled becomes merely rest in transit,
Where each affirms again or must abandon
The pilgrimage to find hope, ever beyond them,
The mirage over the hills, gained only by travelling
Through darkness endlessly and so into dawn.

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON.
(Published by Permission of Outposts)

NEW YEAR, 1955

Floods bore away the ash, the old year subsides
Into smouldering wreckage; in abandoned railway-yards
Carriages groan and sidle along the track
Made soft by falling snow; announcers say
Time has been dislocated;
Trains do not arrive.
In the foreshadowed square
Queues a kilometre long for bread
Wait motionless; as in a frieze
Figures stoop, bow their heads, move on,

A few in the heavy cold
Stumble, old, bent with disease
And dare not suspect even the feeble sun
Can penetrate and uncramp the dark streets from ice,
Can deliver the future from bondage
In their time. In this harsh city frost like barbed wire
Hems every window. The gates are patrolled
By shadowy armed men, the gates
Will be closed all winter. Only the chain-stores
Open three hours a day and the people wait.
But there is nothing more, everything has been sold.

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON.

CHAIN STORE

All faces look along the wide
Glass road; shape and colour lies
Beneath the washed and hung out
Winter light.

Some dolls heavy in their eyes, with
Numb, white hands are piled
Along the dried Strand, far from
The sea for centuries.
Cotton and silk made for breast,
Thigh and hair, the filth
Below a tweed success.
Squares neat, priced for a prying
Gannet swoop of hand.
Have this, yes madam, certainly. No change

For time; age slips upon the surface's
Fingers and rejects
Staleness painted over to reflect
Flies dancing in an empty square.

G. L. NICOL.

AFTER SCHOOL

After school I feel thoroughly drained and dried.
The classroom throbbing still where little lives lately
moved, seeming stiller and emptier for the memories that pry
and fill every inch and thing and crack of space.
The November sunlight pulls long shadows from the desks
and chairs, and gilds their corners harsh and harsher nearer
to the windows while chalk dust settles on the ledges.
The day's tide, listless now, its jetsam drifted
high on the dark shore of my memories, while the light
fails rises and falls gently moving my dread.
like a buoy, and the restless extinction of night coming on.
Down in the yard I can hear the wide-nostrilled scream
of the girl with flaring eyes and long plaits and sad
smile, and the chairs stand vacant in the quiet room.
Soon it will be time to descend the stairs when
the books and chalks and the sound of voices are locked away.
Then it will come, the rush and drag of dread, the nameless
tide that sweeps over me. I know it better
than any joy, or the slow spread of a smile, or desire.
It comes suddenly and overwhelms me with its suddenness,
and the mark it leaves is deeper, more permanent than any
delight. It wears the rock of me away. It comes
after school every day when you go.
It will last through the night until the light
pulls back the tide and I can breathe and be
again, until I am here where you are,
where you move and move me into being
with your laughter and words of scorn and quiet smile.
I dread the time after school of your goodbye.
After school I feel thoroughly drained and dried.

ROY HOLLAND.

CHRIST IN AZULEJO

We sat in the Incarnation Square,
Whose tile-Christ hangs from a yellow wall,
Painted and glazed against grinding trams,
Hand-carts clattering into gutters,
Strident boys, whose shouts defied
The sweep of the Corporation hose.

A sun-tired waiter brought our wine
With *tapas* of stale and softening olives,
Bending an arm and a sullen word
At the grinning eyes of a lamp-post urchin,
Grinning a knowledge of all the wiles
Of a hireling world that robs as it serves.

A shadow fell on the dusty table,
Tracing the faded, gibbering shroud
Of an insubstantial form that sobbed
And whined a crack in its eaten mask
Of cork-bark, hung on a twisted frame,
Quivering like a dead fly's wing.

Her faggot-hand was clawed and trembling,
Grasping and stuffing what we disdained
In a frenzy of subhuman hunger;
She coughed an ageless benediction
And raised her eyes in gratitude
To a glazed and painted Benefactor.

DAVID HOUGHTON.

H A S T E N , N I G H T

Before a cracked glass
She applies the last touches
To her hair, eyes, mouth;
Pencil-skirted, with plump silk knees,
Meekly submissive in her hennaed halo,
She returns to her table to smoke,
Establish a sympathetic bond
Between herself and the waiter,
Gaze at faded wall gold and consider
The sad state of her empty bed.
She is old and to be pitied,
And the passing glances are wasted now.
In her depraved innocence
Vulpine shadows evoke
The faded hand, the midnight kiss,
The tattered banners of perfunctory embraces,
The week-end violence of the forgotten years.

MOSTYN SILVERTON.

O R I E N T A L J A R

Blue landscape and a green dragon
Twisting its smoky length between fat buddhas
In a garden of cherry spray:
An odd collector's item
Cutting its own still being
Out of the morning's window vulgarity.

MOSTYN SILVERTON.

THE WOMAN WITH SUCH HIGH HEELS SHE LOOKED DANGEROUS

You would say the way she was painted was for the war-path,
And sure all sorts of corners stack her dead.
The way she comes at a man gives him no chances
To smile be suave and complicate a truce
And retire undefeated if disgraced.
When her blood beats its drum nobody dances.

Men become wolves, but a wolf has become a woman.
The light in her eyes slants hard and blue as hail.
And when the sun gets at her it is as if
A windy blue plume of fire from the earth raged upright,
Smelling of sulphur, the contaminations of the damned,
The refined fragile cosmetic of the dead.

She clings at your guarding arm as a grass-wisp weakly,
And then her eyes are timid as a hare's,
And her mouth merry as a robin on your finger.
O she is slick and silver as a whiting
To coax your delight as far as the dark, and there, friend, there
Darkness is the scabbard of her knife.

TED HUGHES.

A D V I C E

What we love does not stay
Something we can call our own,
No brain-built facsimile,
Nothing one can make alone.

One may think: the head just so,
Tumbling hair and faithful mouth;
Such pictures are our deadly foe,
A shadowed and secluded growth.

From brittle images we pass
To likeness culled from wind and rain:
Cantos of the weeping grass,
Tall vapours rising in the sun.

PETER REDGROVE.

COLLECTED POEMS (1954) of C. Day Lewis (Cape and Hogarth Press, 21/-)

TRANSITIONAL POEM, like the other poems up to 1935, professes to deal with 'ideas', in fact mere echoes of modish themes: Freudian—"matriarch" (p. 18), the Metaphysical manner—"Antipodes" (p. 17), modern 'realism'—"pithead" (p. 40) . . . in each case, as throughout the poem and book, there is little but signals proclaiming 'modern consciousness' or 'poetic sensitivity' with no personal substantiation. Section 15 is pastiche of Elizabethan dramatic rhetoric, late Yeats, Wyatt and the Elizabethan songsters, Donne/Cowley. But the poised critical intelligence necessary for such handling of the poetic past isn't there in Lewis: his half-conscious, self-indulgent use of it is merely a dodge for concealing, under a show of modish educated impressiveness, a radical failure to sincerely focus and ponder his own experience. The impulse is *poetising* (desire to reel off poems), represented by the attitudinising of

*Then add to this that I
Have known, and shall again, the greedy thigh;
Browned by that sun, but not betrayed. . . .* (p. 49)

"And shall again" is facile rhetoric—one tense meaninglessly suggesting another—not a genuine prediction, and "betrayed" doesn't function in a total significance but just allows the poet to luxuriate in the idea of himself as a profoundly experiencing man. Sometimes the poem is overtly a record of successive poses—"I thought integrity Needed a desert air" (p. 39) and "I stretched a line from pole to pole To hang my paper lanterns on. Poor soul. . ." (p. 78)—but this never becomes the grounds of intelligent understanding; the purpose implied in "Transitional" is no extenuation because to *transcend* intellectual self-indulgence is just what the poet can't do. Poetising, attitudinising, modishness, pastiche—these terms account for the book as a whole.

FROM FEATHERS TO IRON and THE MAGNETIC MOUNTAIN are more extraverted, they try to present 'social consciousness', positive political faith. The creative impulsion is, again, little more than desire to occupy modish positions without feeling and substantiating them personally. The poet satirises public frivolity, ideas of easy salvation—

*Come out in the sun, for a man is born today! . . .
Take a whole holiday in honour of this! . . .
Kipfer's back from heaven, Bendien to Holland,
Larwood and Voce in the Notts eleven . . .
Now shall the airman vertically banking
Out of the blue write a new sky-sign . . .
Today let director forget his deficit,
Schoolmaster his handicap, hostess her false face. . . .* (pp. 75-6)

But this flippant, perfunctory, newsreeling social data is nothing but a display of contemporary au-fait-ness. Behind it is the nascent Marxist's contempt for English (bourgeois) society, but his facile poetising has no room for a mature or intelligent alternative. and the *attitude*, the critical tone, is merely knowing: social perversions are not criticised by means of one cheap/smart item about "hostesses". THE MAGNETIC MOUNTAIN is a monument of emotional inferiority: intellectual careerist jumping onto fashionable bandwagon. Consciousness of political rightness is in Lewis jaunty conceit—

*We can tell you a secret, offer a tonic; only
Submit to the visiting angel, the strange new healer. . .* (p. 116)

The poet claims Marxist insights without a jot of the intelligent understanding of the *status quo* which this needs—the slapdash

rhythm, facile internal rhyme, and implicit concepts of blasé smartness represented by

*Come for a walk in our pleasant land;
We must wake up early if we want to understand
The length and breadth and depth of decay
Has corrupted our vowels and clogged our bowels....* (p. 116)

are typical of the poet's non-seriousness; and the crude materialism this is related to appears in

*Whom shall we take with us? The true, the tested,
Floods over to find a new world and man it,
Sure-foot, Surveyor, Spark and Strong....* (p. 112)

A TIME TO DANCE is quite as immature; Lewis's comment on the mere adventure of 2 airmen flying to Australia in a rickety old plane is "[their] meteor path/Lightened our eyes" (p. 149)—fêting a naive conception of courage in yellow-press terms and tone. The idiom which matches this level of feeling is incongruous grafting-on of modern clichés in an attempt to broaden scope by getting in on contemporary feeling. A friend's death—"So we went home: that was the close of play" (p. 151); the friend's goodness—" [he] Was generous...he attacked the bowling" (p. 151). It is difficult at first to realise that making a moral type out of gamesplaying cliché could be meant as anything but a parody of 'Englishness'.

There's no room to go into the short poems 1935 to 1947. They are characteristic. For tuning-in on vulgar and fallacious attitudes, see the melodramatic confrontation of the reader at the end of *Sex-crime* (p. 176); for facile, incoherent poetising, see the random shifts from one sense-field to another in "The dead wood woke with her..." (p. 253); for facile concept-mongering, see "Oaks hollow as history" (p. 252)—a typical Auden-like pseudo-analogy; for fake significance, see the pseudo-conclusion of *Buzzards Over Castle Hill* (p. 284).

AN ITALIAN VISIT is entirely rotten poetising. Page 309 is consummate pretentiousness—commonplace chitchat about traveling worked up by pumping in modern 'significance'—"travail", "irreversible process", "bourne", "motive", "hiatus"—classy concepts quite unjustified by any rendered depth of feeling; the poetising impulsion is given away in Dick's deliberate cue, "What are we leaving behind, though?" (p. 308). The feeling is extraordinarily inferior; Harry says

I have omitted to pack my Kierkegaard, Marx and Groddeck.

My angst I can only hope they will confiscate at the Customs. (p.308)

That is Day Lewis; education and wide reading are sold off at as cheap a rate as in TRANSITIONAL POEM. Weakness is almost overt in

It's sequence I lack, the talent to grasp

Not a here-and-there phrase

But the music entire, its original stream and logic.... (p. 332)

followed shortly by the patent forcing (and arty, inbreeding terms) of

Another stage, and a change of key. Listen!

Rosetted oxen move....

Tourist slickness seems almost parodied but is, in fact, a basic ingredient in what the poet has to offer. He treats his sense-impressions of landscape (e.g. esp. p. 335) as he treated intellectual experience in TRANSITIONAL POEM; and the pernicious debasing of thought-life exemplified by the "angst" quotation brings out how characteristic and chronic was the brash, and insecure, immaturity with which he took to Communism. So much for the 'development' (convenient tag for 'collected works') of the reviewers.

DAVID CRAIG

“OXFORD POETRY 1954”, edited by Jonathan Price and Anthony Thwaite (Fantasy Press, 5/-).

The literary scene was disturbed some months ago by the announcement of a “new movement of the fifties”. The “new verse” is characterised, according to the *Spectator*, by “its metaphysical wit, its glittering intellectuality, its rich Empsonian ambiguities”. With a few notable exceptions, this “movement” emanates almost entirely from Oxford, and more particularly from the Fantasy Press. It is not surprising then to find that at least a third of the poems in this anthology seem qualified for entrance.

But what, in terms of particular poems, does this imposing array of equipment amount to? Alistair Elliot’s *Metaphysic of a Love* should provide plenty of “metaphysical wit”:

*As in geometry
A man, without a smile,
Divides a line externally,
So we, though love has drawn a finite line,
Know we are lovers still. . . .*

Yes. But hasn’t this kind of thing been done before? There follows a rather self-conscious attempt at novelty: “As if an aeroplane. . . .” “Glittering intellectuality”? George Macbeth uses Latin titles and seems to have read *The Concept of Mind*. But how are his philosophical interests assimilated into his poetry?

*Our mind we figure simply is
The sum of our activity:
I do with mine as he with his—
Ask for the University
When shown around the colleges.*

For comic relief, Mr. Macbeth presents us with *Advice to a Peeping Tom*, dedicated to one of the editors, and bristling with “Empsonian ambiguities” and metaphysical conceits:

*Yet conscience-pricking doubts, like safety-pins,
Once bent and broken, count for less and less;
Angels and demireps both stoop to sin.
So Kant was right. . . .*

Mr. Price also tries his hand at the game:

*Small men make love on stilts, and hold their poise
A step or two; then tumble heavily.
Others dream up frail ladders to the stars. . . .*

While Anthony Lias, like Mr. Thwaite, tries the fashionable line of mythology in modern dress. Ulysses is “pensioned off by wind and sun”; Penelope

*Was never skittish or abrupt
And skillfully avoided rows.*

This poem, with its “witty”, “urbane”, supercilious tone, masking the poet’s inability or unwillingness to become *involved* in his theme, is typical of much of the verse in this volume.

This is not the case with Mr. Lucie-Smith, who, one imagines, cannot be among the most fashionable of Oxford poets. He has no use for defensive irony; he is too deeply engaged in exploring his own experience. *A Typical Childhood* presents with meticulous precision the relation between the child and his environment:

*In the hot noons I heard the fusillade
As soldiers on the range learnt how to kill,
Used my toy microscope whose lens arrayed
The twenty rainbows in a parrot’s quill.*

This comparison between the adult world, bent on destruction, and the child's joy in creation, is subtly developed throughout the poem. In the last stanza, the child's apprehension of the natural world, in all its stark reality, is contrasted with his shadowy understanding of the human world:

*That was the time when a dead grasshopper
Devoured by ants before my captive eye
Made the sun dark, yet distant battles were
Names in a dream, outside geography.*

The same sensitivity is apparent in Mr. Lucie-Smith's *The Giant of the Tree*, where the experience is presented in mythical terms with clarity and a certain delicate humour.

Of the rest, Geoffrey Hill alone has this power of conveying the concrete and particular. In his long poem *An Ark on the Flood*, the scene is set with subtlety and force:

*Our barns remained unfilled and everywhere
The orchards blackened and began to rot,
Their dense boughs made a burden to the air;
Rain glutted all the earth....*

The last line clinches in one tactile phrase the effect of the whole stanza. There follows a personification of Autumn strikingly realised in a single image;

*Autumn lays its full, bruised mouth
To draw the yielding udders of the vine.*

Unfortunately, this level of achievement is not kept up. The poem loses control, and the verse declines into rhetoric and archaism. The same quality is sustained, however, in two other of Mr. Hill's poems: *Prospero and Ariel*—

*I could at least go coolly down
Where the sun's fingers cannot prise
The toad's slack body from the stone—*

and *Gideon at the Well*, which opens with a delicately handled description of spring:

*Nudging and thrusting to the light
Crocuses snuff the air....
Primroses thread the hills, the starved
Flanks of the soil; drenched valleys lie
Heavy as fleece....*

There is little left that demands serious attention. Quentin Stevenson's honest attempts at grappling with personal experience are preferable to Mr. Macbeth's highly-wrought contrivances. And Adrian Mitchell achieves one poem, *The Child*, that makes its point with force and sincerity. But the rest are little more than lyrical trifles, obscuring behind disciplined verse-forms a paucity of genuine emotion. The remarkable thing about this anthology is not that it contains a few very fine poems, but that the general level is so appallingly low. One is grateful to the Fantasy Press for the audience it provides for young poets, but frequent doubts arise as to the critical faculty of its editors. We can only hope the forthcoming *Poetry from Cambridge* will show a better face.

ALAN SHERIDAN.

MOSES

Behind him pressed his people, while before
Day after day the same horizon dithered
Under the same hot, empty sky; the glare
Day after day struck through his sight; and there
Behind his eyes the green, fresh vision withered.

Instead the staring facts—the vacant sky,
The sand, the rocks—lettered his calm dry brain
With mirror images he would not read
Into a meaning that might well exceed
His present sharp sufficiency of pain.

Facts by themselves sufficed to kill the shoots
Of his thankfully shrivelled nerves; he smiled to feel
The outer burning eat back to the bone,
And his moist inner clay convert to stone
Under the senseless, dead breath of the real.
And when some babbling voice streamed through his head
Announcing miracles, he was glad to find
No answering mirage in him made a show
Of verifying its transparent flow
Of nonsense; he had left such dreams behind.

Yet, strangely, as the time went by, and still
He stared and stared the facts straight in the face,
There, as in a dream, he thought he saw
A symbol of a thing that long before
He had known well, but could no longer place.

It was himself he read there in the sand,
In the crumbling stone beside him. A deep shock
Of comprehension jarred him, and he stood
Arrested a moment; then with his brittle rod
In one great fall of hate he struck the rock.
Of course the miracle occurred to time:
In that materialistic, hopeless land,
Out of the rock in a dazzling supple spring
Bright water leapt, intensely glittering,
And ran in quivering tendrils through the sand.

RICHARD ROE

P O M P E I I

Ten lives' cross-sections here were disinterred
When spades rolled back the snow-field of the past.
Not the motif etched on some Grecian sherd

Caused quick-drawn breath, nor any mildewed cast.
The shocks that in one instant life can give
This site still whispers. Here—how echoes last!

Where Maltese workmen clutching at their sieve,
And hawk-eyed Jews within their gaunt sedan
Glimpsed in a lonely moment how men live,

I feel that self-same blow. Here, in a fan
Some virgin hurled away, whose thighs unbarred
Spoke proudly of her change to courtesan,

In lovers trapped upon the bench they shared,
One act sealed guilt for ever. Look, the arm
Raised by a master, who so little cared

For pregnancy as, partly from alarm,
To raise the lash against his bitch, and died.
The dog lies also in the molten calm,

Fangs bared to bite. The passing years provide
With their own brand of static evidence
Just epitaphs that cannot be denied.

Farther along the street, a thief's defence
Is seen played out within the hollowed square.
The diggings damn his plea of innocence,

Show up the sordid underhand affair.
Unanswerably, before it breeds decay,
Time plants its brand, and so persuades despair.

Time's single pattern here sees light of day,
Which gave one purpose to those bustling feet,
And then transfixed them. If you pass that way

Think how time's pattern cannot but repeat.
When someone wrote half-jesting on the wall
A line of Virgil he could not complete:
"They all were silent", he meant best for all.

MARK ROSKILL.

OBSEQUIY AT COLCHIS

Let the filthy vulture pluck my bones
Where some huge lion has despoiled my heart
And bared my bloating stomach to the sun
And strewn upon the sand my every part.

Deny not that foul beak, those noble jaws
This, the just spoil of my mortal years.
The obscene bird clacks requiem enough;
Save for the living all your funeral tears.

At Colchis we put dead men on a pole:
Down drops their carrion to seed new birth,
Or swell the gullet of a wheeling hawk
And make due retribution to the earth.

See where the hecatombs along the shore
Flame on the Euxine, mute, obscure,
High gods breathe uncorrupted savours in
And in their might a grosser food abjure.

Valour and awe spill from the panther's loin
And of his entrails sacrifice is made;
Supplicants devour his seething flesh,
Though vaporous silence satiate a shade.

Rings of fang enclose the solitary place
Where vigil soul in solitude is hung,
Manure the soil from which all virtue springs,
Grind my bones and blend them with rank dung.

E. LUCAS MYERS.

VILLANELLE OF THE CITY AND THE SNOW

This is the land we know
The land of narrowing light
The city and the snow

Shall we flower or grow,
Our soil plinth destined height
In this, the land we know?

The only plinth we know
Is a shroud, of sooty white
The city in the snow

We strike parched feet through snow
A quest these bricks requite
And not the land, we know

Yet is black loam below
Beneath the brick, the night,
The city, and the snow

About these streets we go,
Expect no tundra light
Here in the land we know
The City of the Snow

E. LUCAS MYERS.

THE NEW SOUTH

The true defeat
Was not inscribed at Appomattox,
Nor deep in the lines of Lee's sorrowing face
When he stood by Traveller,
Hand on his vanquished sword,

But rather is now bruited from the great walls of
The Birmingham Country Club,
Lit by Newark-made neon signs,
In every small town,
And crowned by all the Unrecognizable
Progeny. For

Such a death
Is sixty years a-borning.

E. LUCAS MYERS.

PROMINENT AMONG THE MOURNERS..

Prominent among the mourners
Seven highly respectable people,
Faces neatly attuned to gravity,
Uncomfortably seated on wooden pews.
Only a sense of what was fitting
Kept them there from shifting uneasily,
Kept them there, decently garbed in black,
Hiding their triumphant feelings.

Soon they went slowly
And with decorum
To the shiny cars,
To the verdant cemetery,
Stood in a little untidy company
Thinking of anything else but the ending
Thinking of dinner
And business
And women,
refusing the thought of personal death.

Seven highly respectable people;
Butcher and baker, candlestick-maker,
Soldier and sailor
Tinker
And thief,

Stood at the grave-side,
The grave of the beggar-man,
With reservations
Believed in the after-life,
Heard the old words
As they tumbled unheeded
Into the broken earth,
On the green sod.

Heard the promise of
Resurrection,
Inwardly saying;
' But not for him ' .
Made their ways homeward
Conscious of duty done.
Who will forgive them ?

Maybe their gods.

ROBERT ARNOLD.

T W O

Agreed that all the clumsy gods are dead
Who had invented love, they practised
Carefully its old amenities. Contrived
Among all the tall buildings of night and day
An hygienic passion. Assembled bit
By bit the shattered stones of the old dream,
Rebuilt the ruined temple for a makeshift hour.

At the angular end of the old dynasties,
Touching with cool fingers the peripheries
Of his hatred, exploring the stolen ceremony
Of his awkward lust, she found at last
A path she was sure led somewhere to love.
Found the old gods newly murdered in the brush,
Lost among the ghosts of their antique dream.

ROBERT WALLACE.

AN EPILOGUE

Exeunt Omnes. There are sparrows
All outside the house, chittering
In the leafless trees and bushes,
Flitting in the stiff, yellow air

Of late November. Inside the house
The crystal horse prances statically
On the varnished tabletop by the window,
Dust gropes around the chairs, gathers

Peacefully on the wax fruit. The scene
Is laid for a tragedy. The symbols
Brood properly, yielding their meaning—
But the tragedy is enacted, and gone

Beyond the house, the overgrown lawn;
On the windowledges the sparrows
Watch in among the still furniture;
The late sun burns in the dull windows.

ROBERT WALLACE.

